

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2053

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR PBOR IS LE UN
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES

1. SUMMARY: A GOOD DEAL OF HEAT IS BEING GENERATED AT THE UN AND ELSEWHERE ABOUT THE PACE OF ISRAEL'S WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON. CERTAIN STATEMENTS BY THE ISRAELIS AS WELL AS THE POSITION ON THE GROUND RAISE QUESTIONS AS TO THEIR ULTIMATE INTENTIONS IN THAT REGION. THE LEBANESE ARE RATHER ON THE SIDELINES OF THE ARGUMENT, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE THE SITUATION IN BEIRUT IS DETERIORATING IN A DISTURBING FASHION. WE CAN UNDERSTAND ISRAELI CONCERNS ABOUT THE EFFICACY OF UNIFIL AND THE LEBANESE ARMY, BUT ARE CONVINCED THERE IS NOT GOING TO BE ANY PROGRESS ON THE SOUTH LEBANON PROBLEM UNLESS AND UNTIL THE ISRAELIS WITHDRAW. THE PROGRESS, IF SUCH IT CAN BE CALLED, WHICH RESULTS IS NOT GOING TO MEET

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ISRAELI DESIRES COMPLETELY, AND THEY ARE STILL GOING TO HAVE SECURITY PROBLEMS WITH PALESTINIAN TERRORISTS COMING OUT OF LEBANON. WE THINK, HOWEVER, THAT IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO NEUTRALIZE THE AREA SOUTH OF THE LITANI. END SUMMARY.

2. USUN'S REPORT ON THE APRIL 10 SECURITY COUNCIL CONSULTATION WAS A CLASSIC DESCRIPTION OF A BUNCH OF ANGRY DELEGATES VENTING

THEIR SPLEEN AGAINST THE ISRAELIS FOR DRAGGING THEIR FEET ON WITHDRAWAL. I BRIEFED FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS FULLY ON THE SUBJECT AND HE ASKED ME IF THE WITHDRAWAL HAD STARTED YET (AS OF 1200 ON APRIL 11). I SAID WE HAD NO INFORMATION AND HAD BEEN ABOUT TO ASK HIM THE SAME QUESTION. HE SAID THAT HAVING STARTED THE PROCESS, THE ISRAELIS WOULD HAVE TO CONTINUE. THEY COULD NOT REFUSE TO COME UP WITH A REASONABLE TIMETABLE. HE SPOKE COOLLY AND WITHOUT EMOTION.

3. WE HAVE CONSTANTLY REITERATED TO LOCAL AUDIENCES OUR CONVICTION, BASED ON REPORTING FROM THE DEPARTMENT AND TEL AVIV THAT THE ISRAELIS INTEND TO WITHDRAW AND THAT THE FACT THEY HAVE NOT DONE SO TO DATE HAS BEEN DUE TO THE SLOW ARRIVAL OF UNIFIL CONTINGENTS, PROBLEMS OF COORDINATION, ETC. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN THIS POSITION, BUT WE ARE BEGINNING TO WONDER WHAT ISRAELI INTENTIONS ACTUALLY ARE.

4. THEIR WARNINGS TO UNIFIL ABOUT TREATING MAJOR HADDAD CAREFULLY AND KEEPING OUT OF MARJAYUN, THE MILITIA TRAINING PROGRAM THEY REPORTEDLY ARE UNDERTAKING, THEIR DESIRE TO ESTABLISH DIRECT CONTACTS WITH GEN. KHOURY, AND GEN. SIILASVUO'S ACCOUNT OF HIS APRIL 6 CONVERSATION WITH GUR (JERUSALEM 1018) SUGGEST ONE OBJECTIVE IS TO TURN OVER ALL OR PART OF SOUTH LEBANON TO HADDAD AND HIS MEN, OR TO AT LEAST LEAVE THEM IN CHARGE OF A SECURITY BELT ALONG THE BORDER. THEIR COMMENTS ABOUT THE NEED TO PROTECT THE CHRISTIANS FROM THEIR MOSLEM NEIGHBORS OR FROM MASSACRE (USUN'S 1332) MAY BE
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BASED UPON SINCERE CONVICTION, BUT HADDAD'S NEIGHBORS ARE NOTORIOUSLY UNORGANIZED AND UNMILITANT SHI'A, WHO NEED PROTECTION MORE FROM HIM THAN VICE VERSA. MAINTAINING HADDAD AS FIEF-HOLDER OF THE SOUTH IS IN DIRECT CONFLICT WITH THE REASSERTION OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE REGION. IT IS, FURTHERMORE, UNACCEPTABLE TO MUSLIM OPINION IN LEBANON. WE HOPE THAT A DEAL CAN BE WORKED OUT WHICH BOTH ISRAELIS AND LEBANESE CAN ACCEPT, BUT THE REGION WILL HAVE TO BE BROUGHT EVENTUALLY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT OR UNIFIL WILL HAVE FAILED IN ITS MISSION.

5. A SECOND OBJECTIVE, RELATED TO THE FIRST, IS APPARENTLY TO KEEP THE SO-CALLED GOOD FENCE OPEN, AND TO EXPAND IT IF POSSIBLE. TO THIS END THE ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN BUILDING NEW ACCESS ROADS INTO THE AREA. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE FEW DETAILS, WE GATHER THEIR INTENTION IS TO HAVE PAVED ACCESS ROADS FROM ALL OR MOST BORDER VILLAGES INTO ISRAEL. THIS SHOULD FACILITATE THEIR ABILITY TO ATTRACT VILLAGERS ACROSS THE LINES WITH OFFERS OF EMPLOYMENT, TRADE AND SERVICES, AS WELL AS FACILITATING THEIR OWN RE-ENTRY FOR MILITARY PURPOSES. WE SUPPOSE THERE ARE HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS FOR THIS SORT OF ACTIVITY, BUT DON'T HAVE TIME TO LOOK THEM UP. IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, HOWEVER, IT LOOKS A LITTLE MACABRE.

6. THE FIRST TWO OBJECTIVES GIVE RISE TO A QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THERE IS NOT A THIRD; TO MAINTAIN AN INDEFINITE ISRAELI MILITARY PROTECTORATE OVER THE SOUTH. THAT ISRAEL HAS AN INTEREST IN THE BORDER REGION GOES WITHOUT SAYING. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER IT HAS SUCCEEDED IN NEUTRALIZING OR INSULATING ALL ITS OTHER FRONTIERS. THIS ONE ALONE HAS ESCAPED IT BECAUSE OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE AND THE INABILITY OF THE HAPLESS GOL TO DEAL WITH IT. GIVEN THOSE CONDITIONS, AND GIVEN THE HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM, IT WAS PREDICTABLE THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD SEEK A MILITARY SOLUTION WHICH WOULD

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EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

KEEP THE PALESTINIANS AWAY FROM THEIR DOOR. THEY HAVE NOT YET SUCCEEDED. UNIFIL IS UNLIKELY TO BE PERMANENT, FOR FINANCIAL IF NO OTHER REASONS, AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THERE WILL BE AN EFFECTIVE LEBANESE MILITARY PRESENCE ON THE GROUND IN THE NEAR FUTURE IS ZERO. THE ISRAELIS ARE THEREFORE POSING CONDITIONS FOR THEIR WITHDRAWAL, TO THE DISTRESS OF THE USG AND THE INDIGNATION OF THE KUWAITIS, INDIANS AND OTHERS. THEY ARE STUCK WITH A NASTY DILEMMA. IF THEY DO NOT GET OUT, THERE IS NOT GOING TO BE A CEASE-FIRE, AND THEY WILL HAVE TO RECKON WITH US. IF THEY DO, THEY WILL LEAVE BEHIND THE SEEDS OF FURTHER TROUBLE, PARTICULARLY AROUND TYRE. WE SUSPECT THEY WILL PULL OUT BUT WILL ASSERT A RIGHT TO RETURN (A) TO PROTECT THE CHRISTIANS (B) IF THE PALESTINIANS RESUME

ARTILLERY AND ROCKET ATTACKS, OTHERWISE MISBEHAVE.

7. THE LEBANESE, FOR THEIR PART, ARE MAKING EFFORTS TO
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RESTORE SERVICES TO THE SOUTH AND ARE ALLEGEDLY MOVING AHEAD WITH PLANS TO SEND SYMBOLIC FORCES THERE WITHIN THE WEEK. WE WILL BELIEVE IT WHEN WE SEE IT. SARKIS, WHO IS MESMERIZED BY CHAMOUN, IS UNWILLING TO SEND SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF TROOPS FROM THE BEIRUT AREA SOUTH. HE IS AFRAID THEY WILL BE CAUGHT BETWEEN THE ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN MILLSTONES ON ONE HAND, AND AFRAID THEY WILL BE NEEDED IN BEIRUT ON THE OTHER. HE IS NOT ALONE IN THIS VIEW. MANY CHRISTIANS SHARE IT.

8. AS A RESULT, THE LEBANESE ARE NOT EAGER TO REPLACE THE IDF, AND WE FRANKLY DO NOT SENSE ANY FEELING OF URGENCY ABOUT THE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL EXCEPT FROM SUNNI MUSLIMS. THE AVERAGE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN, AND MANY SHI'A AS WELL, WOULD PREFER TO HAVE THE ISRAELIS IN SOUTH LEBANON IF THAT IS ALL IT TAKES TO HAVE PEACE AND QUIET IN BEIRUT. UNFORTUNATELY, HE HAS DISCOVERED THAT THEIR PRESENCE ONLY COMPLICATES RATHER THAN SOLVING HIS PROBLEMS. HE THEREFORE CONCLUDES THAT THE ISRAELIS WILL HAVE TO WITHDRAW SOONER RATHER THAN LATER, BUT HOPES IT CAN BE DONE WITHOUT LETTING THE PALESTINIANS RESUME THE UPPER HAND IN THE SOUTH.

9. THE SUNNI MUSLIM, WHATEVER HIS PRIVATE FEELINGS, IS INTIMIDATED BY PALESTINIAN AND LEFTIST PRESSURES, BUT HE IS NOT RISING TO GREAT HEIGHTS OF INDIGNATION ABOUT THE ISRAELIS. RATHER, HE IS TRYING TO CONVINCE THE CHRISTIAN LEBANESE NOT TO RAISE THE ISSUE OF THE PALESTINIAN ARMED PRESENCE, BECAUSE IT IS SO EXPLOSIVE FOR HIM.

10. MEANWHILE, THE 1500 TROOPS GEN. KHOURY ALLEGEDLY HAD AT HAND TO SEND SOUTH LAST FALL SEEMED TO HAVE TURNED INTO PUMPKINS. THE SO-CALLED VANGUARDS OF THE BEKAA, NOW THE LITANI BRIGADE, TURN OUT TO HAVE ALMOST NO EQUIPMENT AND TO BE STILL UNREADY TO MOVE. THE EQUIPMENT WE HAVE SUPPLIED SINCE LAST NOVEMBER HAS GONE LARGELY TO THE TWO NEW DEFENSE BATTALIONS AT YARZE AND TO THE MILITARY UNITS IN THE BEIRUT REGION, MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN. THIS IS OBVIOUS.
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USLY WHERE THE GOL'S PRIORITIES ARE. THE DEFENSE BATTALIONS ARE IMPRESSIVE, AND ARE GOING TO BE THE NUCLEUS OF THE NEW ARMY, BUT WE WISH FOR MORE SENSE OF URGENCY ABOUT THE SOUTH.

11. HAVING SAID THIS, THERE IS SOME JUSTIFICATION FOR LEBANESE CONCERNS ABOUT THE BEIRUT AREA. SECURITY CONDITIONS HERE HAVE

DETERIORATED STEADILY SINCE JANUARY. AS OF 10:30 APRIL 12 A BATTLE IS RAGING BETWEEN SYRIANS AND LEBANESE IN SOUTH BEIRUT WHERE A FIREFIGHT HAS BEEN GOING ON INTERMITTENTLY FOR THREE DAYS NOW. THE SYRIAN ROLE IN THESE INCIDENTS IS EQUIVOCAL, AND THERE ARE DISTURBING RUMORS THAT THE FIGHTING HAS BEEN SET OFF INTENTIONALLY BY ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER. IF BEIRUT IS GOING UP IN SMOKE AGAIN, THE GOL WILL NEED ALL THE MILITARY STRENGTH IT CAN MUSTER TO SAVE ITSELF.

12. WE ARE NOW EMBARKED ON A COMPLICATED, EXPENSIVE AND DIFFICULT OPERATION TO INSTALL A UNITED NATIONS FORCE IN SOUTH LEBANON. WHEN I CONTEMPLATE THE COST TO THE TAXPAYER OF FERRYING THOSE NEPALESE TROOPS HERE, OR OF FLYING ALL THE RELIEF CARGOES, I AM DISMAYED BY THE EXPENSE AND MAGNITUDE OF THE TASK AND THE LIMITED HUMAN MEANS AVAILABLE TO DEAL WITH IT ON THIS END. IN PARTICULAR, I AM DISHEARTENED BY THE FAILURE OF THE LEBANESE TO RESPOND PROPORTIONATELY WITH MEN. AS A RESULT, UNIFIL WILL HAVE TO DO THE JOB LARGELY BY ITSELF. AS WE HAVE INDICATED EARLIER, WE DO NOT BELIEVE UNIFIL, AND SUCH UNITS OF THE LEBANESE ARMY AS APPEAR ON THE GROUND, WILL BE ABLE TO PREVENT INFILTRATION INTO OR THROUGH SOUTH LEBANON. THE TERRAIN IS TOO DIFFICULT AND THEIR NUMBERS WILL BE TOO SMALL. AT BEST, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO NEUTRALIZE THE AREA IN THE SENSE THAT THEY CAN PREVENT THE PALESTINIANS FROM TAKING IT OVER AGAIN, OR FROM ASSEMBLING ENOUGH PEOPLE TO MASSACRE THE CHRISTIANS, IF SUCH WAS THEIR INTENT (WHICH WE DOUBT), OR FROM CONSTRUCTING NEW FORTIFICATIONS, OR FROM USING THE AREA AS AN ARTILLERY PLATFORM.

13. THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE EFFECTIVE INFILTRATION ACROSS THAT BORDER FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS IN ANY EVENT, THANKS TO THE MEASURES TAKEN BY THE ISRAELIS ON THE OTHER SIDE. THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO
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LIVE WITH THE SITUATION WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM UNIFIL'S INSTALLATION. IT WILL BE FAR FROM PERFECT, PARTICULARLY AS LONG AS TYRE AND BEAUFORT ARE NOT NEUTRALIZED. IT IS AT LEAST CONCEIVABLE, HOWEVER, IF DIFFICULT TO ENVISAGE, THAT AT SOME POINT UNIFIL WILL BE ABLE TO NEUTRALIZE THEM, PROVIDED THERE IS AN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL BACK TO THE BORDER. THERE WILL BE NO CHANCE OF NEUTRALIZING THEM, HOWEVER, SHORT OF A RESUMPTION OF THE WAR, IF ISRAEL DOES NOT WITHDRAW.
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